Memo

To: Commissioners, First 5 Ventura County

From: Petra Puls, Executive Director

Date: February 2, 2025

Re: **Recommendation to update Policy Platform for 2025**

Background

In October 2017, the Commission adopted an Advocacy Policy (Attachment 1), which provides guidance on advocacy activities and calls for annual updates to the Policy Platform. The Advocacy Policy states that staff determines whether a policy matter is in alignment with the Strategic Plan and Policy Platform, and how the issue will affect children prenatal through age five and their families, and/or First 5 Ventura County (F5VC), before engaging in advocacy activities.

The Policy Platform is designed to outline a comprehensive set of recommendations to support children prenatal through age five, their families, and service providers. Using the Policy Platform as a guide, F5VC staff can engage in timely, strategic advocacy activities. The Policy Platform is closely aligned with our Strategic Plan and outlines a policy agenda for F5VC that can be shared with champions of early learning throughout Ventura County to maximize our impact through collaboration and consistency in messaging.

Over the past years, F5VC participated in a variety of advocacy activities including signing onto letters of support, meeting virtually with legislators, participating in First 5 Association statewide advocacy activities, and educating the public and policymakers particularly through social media.

F5VC anticipates that advocacy will play an increasingly important role in our efforts to support young children and their families under the new federal administration and in light of declining Proposition 10 revenues. The proposed Policy Platform was updated to reflect current needs and opportunities and remains with the FY 2020-2026 Strategic Plan.

The Administration and Finance Committee reviewed and approved the 2025 Policy Platform.

Recommendation

The recommendation is to adopt the Policy Platform for 2025.

Proposed February 20, 2025

2024~~5~~ POLICY PLATFORM

First 5 Ventura County's (F5VC) Policy Priorities are aligned with the strategic priorities and goals outlined in the 2020 – 2026 Strategic Plan. These priorities are intended to help F5VC achieve the vision that all children are born healthy, thrive in nurturing environments, and enter school prepared and eager to learn.

1. Sustainability
    a. Advocate for sustainable investments to offset the impact of ~~the Proposition 31 flavored tobacco ban and~~ declining tobacco tax revenue.
    b. Protect and l~~L~~everage other health, family, and child development investments with the goal of establishing a sustainable early childhood system.

2. Comprehensive Child Health and Development
    a. Ensure all children prenatal to age 5 and their families have and utilize comprehensive health and dental insurance, including infant and early childhood mental health services.
    b. Increase routine screenings for prenatal substance use, developmental delays, childhood trauma/Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and parental mental health, and improve the system for referral and follow-up. ~~through Help Me Grow's system of care.~~
    c. Enhance primary care practices to include social and emotional development.
    d. Address the social determinants of health and promote general healthy practices such as good oral health, healthy eating, physical activity, and breastfeeding, and avoiding exposure to harmful substances including tobacco, vaping, hookah, marijuana, and illicit substances.

3. Quality Early Learning
    a. Promote the importance of the early years (prenatal – age three) and early relational health including developmental screenings, optimum attachment and bonding, and early literacy experiences, particularly through Family Resource Centers and home visitation programs.
    b. Promote equitable access to high quality early care and education programs across a mixed delivery system for young children, with a focus on infants and toddlers.
    c. Promote early literacy as a pathway to school success.
    d. Strengthen the compensation and professional qualification of the early childhood workforce.

4. Strong and Resilient Families
    a. Increase parent and caregiver knowledge, understanding, and awareness of early childhood development, healthy lifestyles, and the impact of trauma and toxic stress.
    b. Increase ~~social connections and~~ support for parents through policies promoting improved family leave, flexible work schedules, child tax credits, ~~and additional~~

family friendly benefits, and access to economic supports to meet the basic needs of their children.

c. Provide parents, families, and the community with relevant, timely and culturally appropriate information, resources, services, and support, especially for immigrant families who regularly report fear of utilizing services.
d. Support parents as leaders and advocates for their children, family, and community.

5. Program and Systems Integration
    a. Support communities to prioritize the health, education, and well-being of young children.
    b. Ensure a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion to address and prevent childhood poverty, abuse, neglect, and inequities in education.
    c. Align and integrate systems of care at the state and local level to ensure that young children and their families have timely and seamless access to support and services that best meet their needs.

Approved 10/19/2017

POLICY FOR ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

BACKGROUND

First 5 Ventura County (F5VC) strategic investments place greater emphasis on systems change and capacity building. The Commission's FY 2015-20 Strategic Plan calls for advocating for young children and families by building a shared vision and creating public/political will for programs for young children. This policy establishes the parameters for advocacy activities and expressly permits First 5 Ventura County to advocate for young children strategically, proactively, and in a timely manner.

CRITERIA FOR ENGAGING IN POLICY AND ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

- The Commission remains non-partisan.

- The Commission develops and endorses a Policy Platform to guide F5VC advocacy efforts and identify relevant policy areas. The Policy Platform is aligned with the following four priorities identified in the F5VC Strategic Plan:
  - Children grow up healthy
  - Children enter school ready to learn
  - Parents have the knowledge and resources they need
  - Communities are engaged in supporting and prioritizing children

- The Commission may take positions on federal, state and local policy matters, which may include legislation, regulations, local ordinances, and ballot measures, that affect:
  - Ventura County's children, prenatal to age five and their families
  - F5VC's ability to work towards its mission
  - F5VC's status or its operations, including opportunities to preserve, increase, and expand funding streams dedicated to early childhood

- The Commission may develop positions:
  - Proactively – taking a leadership role to convene stakeholders on a policy matter
  - Reactively – responding to a proposed policy matter

PROCESS FOR ACTING ON POLICY MATTERS

The Executive Director shall determine whether a policy matter is in alignment with the Strategic Plan and Policy Platform, how the issue will affect children prenatal to age five and their families, and/or First 5 Ventura County. If the policy matter is in alignment, staff shall research how similar organizations supporting young children are advocating on the issue, particularly the

position being taken by the First 5 Association and First 5 California, and then the Executive Director shall determine which activities to engage in.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AUTHORITY

The Executive Director has the authority delegated by the Commission to engage in advocacy activities, including but not limited to:

- Provide testimony at public hearings
- Provide written comments and/or letters on proposed policy matters and ballot measures
- Meet with legislators and elected officials
- Write or co-sign letters to legislators and policy makers
- Collaborate with county agencies, funders, nonprofits, etc.
- Interact with the media
- Educate the public and policymakers (trainings, white papers, educational forums)
- Develop parent leadership
- Convene experts
- Publish policy and advocacy related information on the website, in newsletters, and on social media

The Executive Director and the Commission Chair shall have signature authority on letters and written comments. Both the Executive Director and Commission Chair shall co-sign letters and written comments whenever possible.

The Executive Director shall report on policy and advocacy actions taken at regularly scheduled Commission meetings and provide copies of any signed letters.